ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method for processing automatic protection switch (APS) messages at a network element in a tunnel provisioned across a data transport network in order to provide for distributed processing of protection switch request messages involves receiving new APS message at the NE; determining whether the NE is an end point of the tunnel, or a tandem of the tunnel and processing the message accordingly. If the NE is a tandem, message processing involves using local information about tunnel segments of the tunnel only maintained by the NE, to update the local information, and to selectively forward the updated information to adjacent NEs of the tunnel. If the NE is an end point, it updates a status of the tunnel. In a preferred embodiment all NEs are responsible for controlling pending and preemption indicators, and for initiating tunnel condition messages, and the end point NEs are responsible for initiating all other messages.